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AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE

OF THE

NEW TOWN HALL,

IN NEWBURYPORT, JULY 4TH, 1850.

BY HON. CALEB CUSHING.

NEWBURYPORT :
HUSE & BRAGDON, PRINTERS, DAILY UNION PRESS,
1850.

GIFT
MARGARET W. CUSHING
JAN. 26, 1933

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NEWBURYPORT, July 5th, 1850.

GEN. CALEB CUSHING.

SIR :

At a meeting of the Selectmen of the town of Newburyport, and the Building Committee, the undersigned were chosen a sub-committee, to present to you the thanks of both of those bodies, for your able and patriotic Address, at the laying of the corner stone of the new Town Hall, on the 4th instant, and to request a copy of the same for the press.

HENRY JOHNSON, }
E. S. WILLIAMS, } Committee.
THOMAS DAVIS, }

NEWBURYPORT, July 5th, 1850.

GENTLEMEN :

I have the honor to acknowledge the reception of your note of this date, communicating to me the vote of the Selectmen of the Town of Newburyport, and the Building Committee, in relation to the Address delivered by me on the 4th instantis.

With expressions of the most grateful appreciation of the good opinion of the two Bodies which you represent, I herewith place in your hands a copy of the Address.

I am,

Very respectfully,

C. CUSHING.

Messrs HENRY JOHNSON, E. S. WILLIAMS, THOMAS DAVIS.

MR. CUSHING'S ADDRESS

TO THE CITIZENS.

FELLOW CITIZENS :

We have disposed of one of the objects for which we assembled here. There remains another, not local in its nature, but as wide as the limits of our common country. For wheresoever, on this continent of the New World, the starred banner of our nationality is unfurled,—wheresoever, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in all that broad expanse of lake and river, of mountain and of plain,—wheresoever springs up one blade of corn from the earth, or quivers a waterfall under the mill, or ascends on high the smoke of the engine, or happy hearts shelter themselves under the roof-tree of home,—wheresoever, I say, there lives and breathes an American, shall this day be consecrated to the memories of the Declaration of Independence. It shall be celebrated with tumultuous joy by old and by young. It shall be celebrated with proud recollections of our great and wise forefathers. It shall be celebrated with

mutual congratulations in view of our country's grandeur, wealth and power. It shall be celebrated with thanks to Almighty God, that he vouchsafed to make of the Thirteen Colonies one people. And it shall be celebrated, by us, at least, with fervent prayers to Almighty God, that he would continue to make of the Thirty States one people,—one great, glorious, indissoluble Union.

Yes, fellow-citizens, the Union is my theme. Now, when the currents of false doctrine are sapping the foundations of the Union, and the waves of perverted passion are dashing against the pillars of the Constitution, now is not a time for indulging in the sounding generalities of a vague and wordy patriotism. Now, on the contrary, it behooves us to consider what the American Union has done for us; what it is; whether it be worth the having; and if so, how it is to be preserved, in despite of faction and fanaticism, whether at the North or the South. And that, I repeat, is my theme this day.

1. What has the Union done for us? To answer this question, it needs to go back to the time when, seventy-four years ago, this day broke on our fathers, luridly amid the storms of war; to follow onward the course of our country to the present hour; and then to pause and look around on its present condition.

When the Declaration of Independence went forth to the world, a proper constitutional government, that is, a social fabric deliberately commenced from the corner stone of universal natural right, and built up in all the symmetry, beauty and strength of a perfect whole, was a thing yet unknown on earth, and to be attempted by us for the first time in the history of man.

A population of only two millions of souls, scattered

along the narrow belt of land between the Alleghanies and the Atlantic ocean, constituted the people of the United Colonies. Beyond the mountains was a vast wilderness, the lair of the wild beast and of the human savage. Our public resources were nothing,—save the strong arms and stronger hearts, which we inherited from our British sires, and the spirit of independence, personal and national, which had been diffused among us in the shadow of the secular forests of the New World.

Two generations only, that is, two of the average periods of human activity, have since elapsed. They were our grandsires who founded the United States.—But now, where and what are we? Our population has filled up its original seats. It has swarmed across the Alleghanies, and occupied with its industry, its power, its principles, its civilization, the vast and fertile valley of the Mississippi. The remote Rocky Mountains have proved no barrier to its progress. It now stands upon the shores of the Pacific, with expansive energies unabated, regretful, not, like Alexander on the limits of India, that no kingdoms remained to be conquered, but that no wildernesses are left to be reclaimed by the hand of industry from the dominion of uncultivated Nature.

Nor in the wrestle with Nature only have we shown our manhood, for science, learning, art, have also risen up and flourished under the vivifying influences of prosperity and freedom; and in all that appertains to material as well as moral greatness, whether in the cultivation of the earth or in the advancement of mechanic art, manufacture and commerce, we, the once feeble child of England, now range side by side with our great parent, while the nations, distanced by us in the race of wealth and power, gaze on our marvellous progress, with admiration and with awe.

Nay, we have gone twice through the test trial of a foreign war: one with Great Britain, in which if we gained no greater honor, we at least gained this, of contending on equal terms, and with equal success, against the Queen of Nations; and again, with Mexico, in which, from Palo Alto to Chapultepec, whether under the lead of Scott or of Taylor, wherever the flag of the Union waved, it still waved in the front of the fight, the labarum of victory. And through the whole period of this, our unparalleled growth in greatness, we, and we alone, of the nations of Christendom, have exhibited the spectacle of a people to whom civil war is unknown, among whom no example exists of death for political cause, and who have lived in unbroken domestic tranquility under the ægis of the Constitution.

2. Is, then, the Union, the source of all these priceless blessings, worth having? Yes, in the madness of men to whom superabundant felicity seems a burden, we have now come to calculate the value of the Union. That I think surpasses our faculty of calculation. When we shall have passed those glorious gates of our political Paradise, which separate the known from the unknown, then, like the fallen Adam and Eve, gazing, miserable and repentant, where, to bar their return,

“The brandished sword of God before them blazed
Fierce as a comet,”—

then, I say, it will be for us “to choose” like them, our new “place of rest.” Where shall that place be! You, who seek to accomplish objects, for the attainment of which you clamorously and ostentatiously avow your readiness to trample on the Bible to-day and the Constitution to-morrow, because they both stand in your path,—you who set up your moral conscience against the former, and your political conscience against the latter

of you I ask, what are the institutions, and what the political condition, which you propose to give the people of the United States, in exchange for our Constitution and the Union, of which that is the charter?

That, in the overthrow of the Constitution and the disruption of the Union, our national wealth is to be destroyed,—that the production of those great agricultural staples, on which our prosperity depends, is to cease, or at least to cease for us,—that our manufactures are to languish and expire,—that our ships are to rot unemployed,—for all this, you, in the zeal of your assumed philanthropy, do not care. But can you expect, can you be so blindly visionary as to believe, that the bonds of this Union are to be rent asunder by violent hands, for the express purpose of a revolutionary social change in the relation of the white and the black races of the country; can you pretend to think, I say, that the political equality of those races is of a sudden to be brought about except by force? You know it; and the first step, therefore, in the constitutional change for philanthropy's sake, is the organization of hostile Republics, plunged at once into war, civil war, social war, servile war, all that in warfare, foreign or domestic, there is combined of deadly, of atrocious, of horrible.

I have endeavored to picture to myself that Republic of New England, to the adoption of which the inconsiderateness of many among us, the perverseness of others, and the criminally ambitious vanity of a few, are, by their assaults on the Union, endeavoring to bring the people of Massachusetts. We dissolve the Union under the impulse of a blind, bigoted and one-sided zeal in the pursuit of our own opinion. We dissolve it for the express purpose, as already stated, of imposing on the people of others of the now United States, a vi-

olent and revolutionary change in their social relations. We dissolve it in the spirit of fanatical aggression and fanatical hatred against them, and they of course are to hate us with proportional intensity. I pass over that war of crusading philanthropism on the one side, and of passionate self-defence on the other, which I have already foreshadowed as the necessary consequence of disunion, under such circumstances. We, of the six striped flag of New England, shall have at length paused a moment in our career of meddlesome madness, to examine the internal condition of Massachusetts.-- When that dread day of reckoning, between union and disunion arrives, at some chance interval of truce betwixt us and our enemies, let us reflect how and where Massachusetts will stand. We possess, we can possess, none of the great agricultural staples, which fill the channels of commerce. We depend on importation from abroad for the very bread we eat. Those great producing and consuming States, against which we have been marching our armies and sending our fleets, in the cause of abolitionism, have either been broken down in the contest, and neither produce nor consume, or they have come out of the struggle, victorious and vindictive. In either case, our fisheries no longer find a market at the South, which will have an abundant supply from the British Provinces. Our ships are excluded from the ports of the South by differential duties, and our ship-owners have transferred themselves and their capitals to the South, or to some neutral State. Our manufacturers have no longer the markets of the severed States secured to them by protective duties, and they encounter a ruinous competition, either local or foreign, in every port of the South and West. And then, with productive industry paralysed, with passions

inflamed by political disasters, comes that crisis of domestic conflict, which in like circumstances has come on other Republics, which effaced all the glories of learning and art in Greece, which prostrated the colossus of Roman greatness, which ruined the once flourishing cities of mediæval Italy,—that conflict between the Have-alls and the Lack-alls, in the progress of which, when the demons of Party and of Anarchy shall have done their work, then, over desolate fields, and ravaged dwellings, and depopulated cities, there gleams omnipotent the bloody sword of the Conqueror and the Tyrant, to wreak upon you the vengeance of a justly indignant God. That will be what we are to have instead of the Union. All experience teaches it. No casuistical sophistry, of tampering with public duty under pretence of a conscience above the Bible and the Constitution, can avert it. That miserable wreck of our greatness will be your New England Republic. Therefore, to the question, whether the Union is worth having, I reply, that it is not only to be cherished for all of good which it gives, but also for all of unutterable ill, which its dissolution, for such cause, and under such circumstances, inevitably involves.

What then is the Union?

I reply that it is, in the first place, the *letter* of the written Constitution, defining the rights to be held, and stipulating the duties to be performed, by the Federal Government, by the States, and by the people of the United States, and to which every man owes lawful allegiance, and against which public law no man has any more or other right to set up his individual conscience, than he has against the municipal laws, enacted by any one of the States, for the protection of property or life within its borders.

And I reply, in the second place, that the Union is above all the *spirit* of the Constitution, that is, the sentiment of nationality, the love of country engendered by birth, by the ties of domestic life, by community of historical associations, and by the sense of benefits conferred, and interests protected and promoted, by the instrumentality of the Union.

The letter of the Constitution is the material body, changeable, perishable, corruptible; the spirit of it is the immaterial soul, which breathes into the inanimate elements the breath of life, and makes of it a sublime and beautiful creation of immortality and of heaven.

This, the spirit of the Constitution, the sentiment of nationality, the feeling and emotion of *Americanism*, is the true Union, the only Union worth having, the only Union possible to keep.

When the American wanders into other regions of the earth, then it is that he feels and appreciates the true vital spirit of the Constitution. Whether, borne along by wind and wave, he walks the deck of his gallant ship, as her keel cleaves the pathless wastes of the illimitable ocean,—or he lingers amid the palaces of religion, and art, and power, in refined and populous Europe,—or explores those Oriental solitudes, whose hallowed associations are eloquent as it were with voices from on high,—or inspects the antique civilization of the thronging millions of Asia,—or partakes of the daily march and the nightly bivouac on the lofty plateau of the New World,—then it is that he feels that he has a country, a country to love, to be proud of, to defend, and to uphold against all enemies. And that country is the Union. I have tried it and I know it. Neither the pine of Massachusetts, nor the palmetto of Carolina, symbolizes to him all there is of dear in the memories

of home, and of glorious in the name of country. No: the inspiration of hope, which no reverses can extinguish, the impulse of courage which no dangers can daunt,—these are identified in our breasts only with the stars and stripes of the Union.

How then is the Union, so dear to every patriotic heart, and of such inestimable value to all of us, to be preserved?

I reply to this question, by stating how I think it may be destroyed; or at least how you, the people of Massachusetts, if you labor diligently and zealously in that view, may do much to promote and finally consummate the dissolution of the Union.

Desiring and intending to dissolve the Union, you will, in the first place, as you have already done, knowingly, and of malice aforethought, infringe as a State upon express provisions of the Constitution, for the avowed purpose of injury to the citizens of other States.

You will, in the second place, as you have already done, maintain such unconstitutional legislation on the ground of your conscience not permitting you to execute the injunctions of the Constitution, thus demonstrating to the other States of the Union that no compact of association with you is of any avail, since you in effect claim the privilege of disregarding the law of the land at pleasure, and of being dispensed, not by any papal authority, but by your own capricious conscience, or pretence of conscience, from keeping your implied engagements, or even your solemn express oath of fealty to the Union.

By these acts and doctrines, steadily persevered in, you, the State of Massachusetts, may hope to succeed in dissolving the Union, so far as that consists of a written constitutional compact.

Of the individual citizens of Massachusetts, each and all may do much to the same end, by exerting themselves to kill the spirit of the Constitution.

In this aim, you will let pass unimproved no occasion for violent, habitual, systematic misrepresentation and denunciation of the character and principles of your fellow-citizens of other States. In order to do this more thoroughly, you will establish newspapers, form societies, and hold anniversary and other meetings, for the sole or chief object of exaggerating their faults and maligning their motives and actions. If accustomed to writing or public speaking, you will publish books or pamphlets, or perambulate the country delivering lectures, in the same sense. And if you hold any station conferring on you authority as one of the religious, moral, or political guides of society, you will not fail to make your office the special means, as much as possible, of disseminating such obloquy and detraction.— Thus you will eventually succeed in completely alienating from you the regard of the citizens of other States, and preparing them to accept the disunion you tender to them, and to change readily from the condition of your countrymen to that of your foreign enemies.

But the people of the several States must co-operate in the performance of political acts, without which no common government can exist among them, and the Union expires of itself. You are to elect a Congress to enact, and a President to execute, the laws of the Union. If you sincerely desire disunion, as would appear from the acts and language of many, you will, accordingly, make the election of President a merely sectional question; and you will be careful to vote for no person as member of Congress, unless he will previously pledge himself to hold such opinions, and propose or

support such measures, as shall render it impossible for him to co-operate with the members of Congress from other States in the enactment of laws for the public good. If one of your representatives in Congress dedicates himself to the task of embittering sectional prejudices, inflaming resentments, and resisting all measures of conciliation, peace, and constitutional harmony, him you will glorify and maintain, for he is doing your work in furthering the dissolution of the Union. But if one of your representatives presumes to speak to you of your duty as good citizens, to appeal to your constitutional engagements, to plead for justice, moderation, wisdom, common sense,—him crucify, for he stands in the way of your endeavors to dissolve the Union.

If by all these means and appliances you do not accomplish your object, you need take but one step more, and the result is sure. You violate the Constitution. You tell the other parties to it that you do not consider yourself bound by any engagement you may have made with them, however deliberately in time, however solemnly in form. By persevering calumny of your fellow-citizens, you have at length got them to hate you sufficiently. You will suffer no public functionary of yours to co-operate with them in the common councils of the nation. What remains to be done? But one thing, namely, to assure the other States, that it is not for their interest any longer to bear with you. And this you now do, in proclaiming that your ultimate purpose, your sole object, the main business of your life, to which you stand prepared to sacrifice both the Constitution and the Bible, is to bring upon certain of the United States a violent and revolutionary change in their social condition, which is to constitute of itself their utter impoverishment, and which involves, undeniably, and beyond

all possible doubt, a sanguinary and destructive war of races, fatal to one of them, disastrous to both, and at the mere anticipation of which it would seem that every rightly constituted mind would recoil with horror and dismay. Yes, I say to you, my fellow countrymen of the North, it only needs to satisfy the South that you are in earnest in the aggressive purposes in this respect, which you avow, and for the accomplishment of which you have already taken so many preparatory steps,—satisfy the South of this, and you will then surely succeed in dissolving the Union, for you will have rendered it impossible for the South to remain in it without death and dishonor.

Fellow citizens, I have thus briefly sketched the means by which the Union may be dissolved, nay, by which it is now already placed in imminent peril.—Greatly do they err, who imagine that this or that shadow of nullification, whether in Hartford Conventions or Nashville Conventions, really constitutes the dark cloud of danger, which is gathering and deepening and lowering over the firmament of the Union. No: the true and only serious disunionism consists of acts of systematic aggression of one part of the Union against another, in violation of both the letter and spirit of the Constitution; and the true and honest unionism is that, which strictly observes the constitutional compact, and is animated by sentiments of kindly support, forbearance, good-will and conciliation towards our fellow members of the Union.

Nor is it by the relentless application, to any given case, of the mere dead weight of a majority, that the Union is to be preserved. We of the North are strong in numbers, in votes, in physical force:—is it unionism to violate the letter and spirit of the Constitution, and thus to place the South in the alternative of the dishon-

or to be incurred by passive submission to the unjust act of a majority, or to imputed factiousness by resistance to it? No, that is disunionism, as this day, if rightly read, may serve to admonish us. For what is the Declaration of Independence? We speak of it as the commencement of our nationality. How? Was it not also a solemn act of disunion, the declaration of an oppressed minority, the Colonies, that they would no longer continue united with an oppressive majority, consisting of the rest of the British Empire? Think you that no dear bonds of common country, of religious and political association, were sundered by the Declaration of Independence? Aye, many; for England still bore, even on the lips of our forefathers, the affectionate appellation of HOME. But ten years of actual or intended unconstitutional aggression on their rights, ten years of depreciation and denunciation of their character and conduct, ten years of legislative warfare on their interests, served to obliterate from the minds of the minority all impressions of common nationality with the majority, and produced that Declaration of Independence. And although England set a price on the heads of John Hancock and Thomas Cushing as traitors, yet they well might and they did retort, that the aggressor and not the aggrieved,—that the violator of the public compact, not the victim of the violation,—that the oppressive majority, not the oppressed minority,—was responsible for the dissolution of the union between the British Colonies and the British Metropolis.

My friends, I repeat, there is solemn admonition, as well as proud recollection, for us all, in this anniversary. Are we, of the State of Massachusetts, against this Union or for it? If the latter, as I firmly believe, then it becomes us to cease from all those acts which lead to

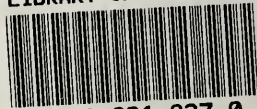
disunion, as evidently as the flowing river does to the sea; it becomes us to desist from wanton vituperation of our fellow-citizens of other States,—to desist from aggressive assaults on their peace,—to desist from disobedience to the organic law,—in a word, faithfully to observe and maintain both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution.

The living men, who uttered the Declaration of Independence, have all passed away from time to eternity. But their spirits watch over us from the bright spheres to which they have ascended. We stand in their presence. They shall be our witnesses, as we solemnly renew on this day our vows of unalterable attachment to the Union, and declare that

“—nor steel, nor poison,
“Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing”

shall prevail against it; and to this “we pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor,” so help us God!

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